



**URBAN NATURE**  
**BASED SOLUTIONS**  
**GUIDE FOR SMALL**  
**BUSINESSES**



# URBAN NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

As sustainability becomes a growing priority for cities and businesses alike, small urban businesses are increasingly turning to Nature-based Solutions (NbS) as a way to boost resilience, reduce environmental impact, and improve customer and employee satisfaction. Nature-based solutions work with nature to tackle societal challenges like climate change, urban heat, and pollution, while also [supporting biodiversity and enhancing the livability of cities](#).

But how can small businesses, often with limited resources, take advantage of these innovative solutions? This guide explores manageable ways for urban small businesses to incorporate NbS and create both environmental and business value.

## WHAT ARE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS?

Nature-based solutions are approaches that use natural processes to solve environmental, social, and economic challenges. They can include the protection, sustainable management, or restoration of natural ecosystems - but can also involve [integrating green infrastructure into the built environment](#).

For small businesses in cities, urban NbS can take many forms, such as green spaces, green roofs, and street trees. These solutions not only contribute to urban biodiversity and sustainability but can also help businesses save on energy costs, improve workplace well-being, and attract eco-conscious customers.

## WHY NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS MATTER FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Nature-based solutions are gaining momentum because they offer a "triple win": they deliver benefits to people, support biodiversity, and [help mitigate climate change](#). For small businesses, integrating NbS can lead to tangible outcomes such as:

- + **Cost savings:** Reduced energy and water bills due to better insulation, natural cooling, and sustainable water management.
- + **Enhanced reputation:** Being an eco-friendly business can attract environmentally-conscious consumers.
- + **Improved employee well-being:** Green spaces and nature-based solutions can make workplaces healthier and more pleasant, boosting morale and productivity.
- + **Regulatory compliance:** Many cities are introducing policies that favour or mandate the use of NbS, especially in stormwater management and urban planning.



## HOW SMALL BUSINESS CAN INTEGRATE NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Here are examples of low-cost, space-efficient nature-based solutions that small urban businesses can implement:

- + **Small-scale green walls or gardens:** For businesses that don't have much ground space, a green wall or vertical garden can be a great option. These are typically installed on exterior walls or even inside the workspace if you have sufficient natural light. They not only improve air quality and insulate the building but also create a refreshing, eco-friendly atmosphere that customers and employees will appreciate.
- + **Planters and container gardens:** If your business operates in a highly urbanised area, adding planters with native plants or small trees near your entrance, patio, or rooftop can make a big impact. These small gardens can help reduce air pollution and create a cooling effect, which is particularly helpful during the hot summer months.
- + **Green window boxes or hanging gardens:** If your business is in a city or lacks outdoor space, window boxes or hanging baskets filled with flowers or plants can brighten the exterior while contributing to urban greenery. These are easy to install and require very little space, making them perfect for businesses located in high-density urban areas.
- + **Small pollinator gardens:** Support urban biodiversity by planting small pollinator-friendly gardens in courtyards or entryways. These can help support populations of bees and butterflies, which are vital for ecosystems but often struggle in urban areas.
- + **Bug hotels:** A bug hotel is a manmade structure created to [provide shelter for insects](#). They come in a variety of shapes and sizes and are great for attracting different types of minibeast such as ladybirds, bees, woodlice and spiders. You might even get frogs or hedgehogs coming to stay.

## MEASURING THE IMPACT OF NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Even if small businesses lack the resources for detailed tracking, it's still important to measure the benefits of nature-based solutions over time. Here are some straightforward, practical ways to assess the impact:

- + **Energy savings:** Monitor your bills to see if natural cooling from green roofs or walls have reduced your heating or cooling costs. Over time, these savings can add up.
- + **Customer and employee feedback:** Ask employees and customers about their experience with your nature-based solutions. This feedback can help highlight [improvements in employee well-being](#) and customer satisfaction.



- + **Biodiversity:** Keep an eye on your green spaces to see if they are attracting pollinators like bees, butterflies, or birds. Noticing more wildlife around your business is a great indicator that your nature-based solutions are contributing to urban biodiversity. You could even encourage employees to take part in a wildlife survey, for example [The Big Butterfly Count](#).

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

When selecting and implementing nature-based solutions, small businesses should:

- + **Start small and scale up:** Begin with manageable projects that fit within your budget and expand over time as resources allow.
- + **Align with your business goals:** Ensure the NbS aligns with your company's broader sustainability strategy. For example, if reducing your carbon footprint is a priority, focus on projects like tree planting or green roofs.
- + **Partner with local organisations:** Collaborate with local governments, non-profits, or other businesses to share costs, resources, and expertise.
- + **Avoid greenwashing:** Be transparent about your sustainability efforts. Ensure your projects are part of a genuine, long-term strategy rather than isolated, one-off initiatives.

## NEED MORE HELP?

By integrating urban nature-based solutions, small businesses can play a crucial role in creating more sustainable, resilient cities. One small rooftop garden might not seem like a lot, but imagine the impact if multiplied out across a city.

These solutions offer practical benefits that go beyond environmental impact, with the potential to improve your bottom line, enhance your brand, and contribute to a healthier, more livable community. With thoughtful planning and realistic goals, NbS can be a powerful tool for small businesses looking to thrive in an increasingly eco-conscious world.

If you would like guidance on integrating nature-based solutions into your business strategies, feel free to reach out to our sustainability executives at [info@future-plus.co.uk](mailto:info@future-plus.co.uk).

